

PART VI: EVALUATION – “HOW ARE WE DOING?”

Statewide Planning believes that the best basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the process used to prepare, develop and implement the Rhode Island CEDS is how well we follow this outline:

- A. Achieve the objectives of the state’s *Economic Development Policies and Plan*.
- B. Involve government (federal, state and local), academia and others.
- C. Select high quality projects under the CEDS criteria.
- D. Achieve employment and income goals.

Our assessment is as follows.

A. Achieving the Objectives of the *Economic Development Policies and Plan*

As stated previously, all CEDS applicants are required to show which objectives and policies in the *Economic Development Policies and Plan* are implemented by their projects. All the proposals on the Priority Project List, therefore, may be presumed to fulfill this obligation – i.e., to implement the premier economic development element in the State Guide Plan.

B. Involvement of Government, Academia and Others

In general, economic development in Rhode Island involves practitioners within the public and private sectors, state and municipal government, and local and regional organizations.

Within state government, long-range planning is the purview of the Economic Development Planning Section of the Statewide Planning Program. Elsewhere in the public sector, the Economic Policy Council is responsible for strategic planning that has tried to capitalize on Rhode Island’s geographic position between Boston and New York and its emerging role as a player in both markets. The RIEDC has provided capital and land for business expansion or relocation, and with the Policy Council has promoted the development of industry clusters.

Regional (in-state) economic development organizations, such as the Central Rhode Island Development Corporation, provide technical assistance and project management capabilities. A municipality may have its own economic development director, or locate that responsibility within the planner's office. Local officials may work with neighboring communities, the regional development corporations, or industry collaboratives such as RIMES.

Academic institutions, notably Bryant College and Rhode Island College, contribute by hosting export assistance or policy development programs that reach out to individual firms and community groups. The University of Rhode Island houses the state's Ocean Technology Center and Roger Williams University the Center for Environmental and Economic Development, both essential to the development of the marine industry cluster.

All these practitioners have a history of collaborating on common goals and objectives in Rhode Island. The CEDS has been a vital tool for them with its links to the State Guide Plan and to EDA, which has provided construction or planning grants for most of the efforts described above. As the CEDS continues year to year, so does the level of participation and cooperation among the practitioners. Like the CEDS staff, they view the CEDS as an important implementation mechanism for economic development.

The CEDS Committee brings many of these actors and players together. Among its three units, there is representation for economic development issues from the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, the AFL-CIO, the RIEDC, a number of municipal planning and development officials, the RI Public Utilities Commission, the Urban League and academic institutions. The CEDS Subcommittee itself includes representatives of the Center for Public Policy at Rhode Island College, the South Providence Development Corporation, the West Elmwood Housing Corporation, the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Planning Association, and Grow Smart Rhode Island.

C. Selecting High Quality Projects under CEDS

It is incumbent upon the staff to keep the CEDS user- (applicant-) friendly and in tune with current trends in Rhode Island. We do this by reviewing our selection of projects with a CEDS Subcommittee drawn from the ranks of the Technical Committee of the State Planning Council and nominees from "the outside" who are themselves practitioners and eligible CEDS applicants. We discuss any problems encountered during project solicitation and how effective each criterion is in selecting quality projects. We receive feedback from the Subcommittee, particularly valuable if members actually submit proposals that year.

The Subcommittee is encouraged to recommend any changes that can make the program run more smoothly, including dropping, adding, or revising the scoring criteria. These recommendations are then taken to the full Technical Committee, along with the Project Priority List, and once approved there are taken to the Planning Council. If the Planning Council approves the changes, they are incorporated into the program and become effective with the next solicitation.

This process of project solicitation, committee review, applicant/practitioner feedback, and committee approval will be continued into the foreseeable future, as will the normal workday contacts between Statewide Planning and the RIEDC, the Economic Policy Council, and planners in the cities and towns. The latter will naturally carry over into areas indirectly related to the CEDS, such as our agency's advisory role on the state Enterprise Zone Council, and our review of economic development elements of local comprehensive plans.

Also anticipated in the current fiscal year is a major project by the Center for Public Policy at Rhode Island College to conduct a performance review of EDA funding in Rhode Island, which has obvious implications for the CEDS. This will include following projects funded over the years to their conclusion in terms of job and wealth generation and other indicators of economic improvement. Statewide Planning will be assisting the Center for Public Policy to the extent possible with records, files and institutional memory.

D. Achievement of Employment and Income Goals

Success in this area is perhaps the hardest to gauge as a function of the CEDS, given the limited number of projects that are likely to be funded and the gross scale on which input-output models typically are based. We might expect that, statewide, individual projects would not appear to make much impact. On the other hand, they may start a process leading to continuing growth in an industrial sector that will manifest itself more obviously in a five- or ten-year period.

We are anticipating much from the Center for Public Policy's performance review. It will track projects and changes over a period spanning more than 30 years, and should be able to detect impacts that are missed over a shorter period. Moreover, this evaluation will cover a broader universe than just OEDP or CEDS projects. It will include planning assistance that served as a support function for economic development in general, but was likely to affect CEDS as policies evolved from planning.

E. Performance Measures

To assess our progress in attaining our goals and fulfilling our vision – i.e., following the outline above – we established a number of performance measures in the CEDS *Annual Report* for 2001:

1. Continue to involve as broad a range of economic development practitioners in the CEDS process as possible, on the CEDS Committee (including the CEDS Subcommittee) and in the solicitation of projects.

2. Refine the project proposal screening criteria whenever and wherever appropriate to select for high quality projects that achieve economic and other objectives in the State Guide Plan.

3. Strive for racial, ethnic and cultural diversity on the CEDS Committee by involving community organizations and other groups often considered “out of the loop” in economic development policymaking.

4. Monitor the successes (and failures) of projects previously funded by EDA that went through the OEDP or CEDS process with regard to reaching their stated employment and income goals.

We can confidently report favorable outcomes for the first three measures, outcomes we assume will remain favorable under our current work plan. Previous sections in this report have attested to this, in particular the Introduction and Part One. As to the fourth measure, we will defer to the staff of the Center for Public Policy and their upcoming report. Progress will be cited in future CEDS *Annual Reports*.